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The
American Historical Review

IMAGINATION IN HISTORY¹

I.

TO judge by the complaints of educators and employers the pressing danger of the republic is inaccuracy: the school-boy does not know how to add, nor the biological assistant to dissect, nor the graduate student in history to tell a story truly. We know that the daily press has little regard for truth, because every evening paper is constantly convicting every morning rival of falsehood. Public speakers make up their anecdotes and distil wrong deductions into the minds of their hearers; the records of Congress are full of speeches that were never spoken, and omit much of the raciness of actual debate.

Even historical scholars are not without their failings, their prejudices, and their falsehoods. The other day a leaf in the storm of advertisements led me to suppose that a noted group of historians—Bancroft, Trevelyan, John Fiske—will be quite discredited when Mr. Arthur Johnston's book gets the public ear, for he has discovered that "all histories of the American Revolution, those written by Americans as well as many written by Englishmen, are for the most part unreliable, misleading, unfaithful to the facts, in many cases even mythical. . . . No American should leave this book unread." This is the argument of the young theological student in his sermon on the Cain episode: "Cain was a bad man; Cain was a Bible critic; and he became an atrocious murderer." Once let an

¹Annual address of the president of the American Historical Association, delivered at New York, December 28, 1909.

historical critic loose and you start a Philadelphian brick-row of destructive criticism. Whately historically doubted Napoleon Bonaparte; and a later writer was emboldened to put forth *Historical Doubts relative to the Archbishop of Dublin*. History nowadays is placed on the defensive. By your good-will, for the moment champion of the American Historical Association, I mean to-day to blow the trumpet hanging at the gate and demand of Giant Error the causes of this alarming state of things.

These causes are not peculiar to modern American civilization. Horace Walpole a century and a half ago sounded the following war-cry against our craft—which he immediately joined:

So incompetent has the generality of historians been for the province they have undertaken, that it is almost a question, whether, if the dead of past ages could revive, they would be able to reconnoitre the events of their own times, as transmitted to us by ignorance and misrepresentation. . . . Truth is left out of the discussion; and odes and anniversary sermons give the law to history and credulity.

We might bear with historical writers merely stupid, but what shall we do with the false and misleading? Listen to the late Edward A. Freeman—not by an interview just transmitted over Mr. Stead's medium-post, but in what a critic years ago called Freeman's "Most congenial task—that of belabouring Mr. Froude—(in which) he could be almost as interesting as Mr. Froude himself". Says Freeman:

I know no other writings professedly historical, in which page follows page in which it is really safe to follow the rule of contrary. . . . Mere inaccuracy in detail is quite another matter from the purely fictitious character of large parts of Mr. Froude's story. . . . Mr. Froude stands alone as the one writer of any importance of whose writings one can say that on them any process of correction would be thrown away. The evil is inherent; it is inborn. . . . If history means truth, if it mean fairness, if it means faithfully reporting what contemporary sources record, and drawing reasonable inferences from their statements, then Mr. Froude is no historian.

This suggests De Quincey's objection to a murderer as a valet: "For, if once a man indulges himself in murder, very soon he comes to drinking and Sabbath-breaking, and from that to incivility and procrastination. Once begin upon this downward path, you never know where you are to stop."

Without trying to settle the moot question whether Froude was a liar or an innocent third party, or one of the world's great historians, some sympathy should here be expressed for those unlucky historiographers who on matters of historical truth know not their right hand from their left. One of the most genial, most eminent,

and most beloved of Bostonians had a habit of writing tales that sounded exactly like history, and history that was chiefly fiction. When one of my predecessors in this office, Justin Winsor, remonstrated with him for making unhistorical statements, the author replied that those things were history to him, and doubtless would be to his readers.

Is there no penal code for those who undertake to write history out of something other than the records, to gloss the truth with a quality of mind which is outside of the events themselves? The trouble with many historians of large reputation who have a host of readers is that corroder of exactness—imagination. It is the duty of a sober and studious body like the American Historical Association to dwell upon the strictly scientific character of history, to emphasize the fixed principles of research, to warn the world against the consequences of unsound study and writing of history. The remedy is a matter of method and process and point of view. Is there any way to make history true, except to relieve it of all imagination?

II.

The first place for reform is at the fountainhead—the sources. Innocent people suppose that they can rely on history if only it is founded upon documents; but historiography is undermined by unreliable or frankly fraudulent sources. The Middle Ages much enjoyed fabricating the ancients. Thus the great scholar Sigonio, in 1583, thrust upon a confiding world the *Consolatio* of Cicero; and the publisher hit on the ingenious idea (commended to the modern newspaper) of drawing from the great scholar Sigonio an opinion that none but Cicero could have written the book. The seventeenth century boasts of many such works of the imagination, for example, Bishop Gauden, “a very comely person, and a man of vast parts”, who in 1649 foisted upon the world the *Eikon Basilike* as the work of King Charles the First.

The eighteenth century is the golden age of imaginary historians, of whom the greatest was George Psalmanazar, whose very name is a guarantee of candid bad faith. In 1704 he evolved out of his internal consciousness an *Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa*, which was plainly one of the most distant spots visited by Sindbad the Sailor, a region of which the least of its wonders was the tame rhinoceroses and sea-horses. This was the era of Macpherson and his harnessed Ossian; the age of Chatterton, the most remarkable of all fabricators, for his “Old Rowley the Monk” wrote what would have made any young man famous.

Of the multitude of forgeries in the nineteenth century the palm goes to the French artist in vellum, Lucas, who fairly carried on a jobbing trade in spurious letters. Among the 27,000 which one customer, M. Chasles, took were autograph letters from Sir Isaac Newton, Shakespeare, Rabelais, Plato, Lazarus to St. Peter, Judas Iscariot to Mary Magdalene, and Strabo to Juvenal—who was a little matter of ninety-two years Strabo's junior.

English history has been enriched by many similar documents, such as Ingulf's *History of the Abbey of Croyland*, which in its fall carried with it various learned treatises which had leaned upon it. Only about sixty years ago one Constantine Simonides, said to be "not a votary of strict veracity", made and sold palimpsests, created a so-called *History of Egypt* by Uranius, and later tried to prove his honesty by asserting that he had with his own hands forged the *Codex Sinaiticus* which Tischendorf made the basis of the revised text of the New Testament.

America has had some experience of historical imagination: the Reverend Mr. Peters's "Blue Laws of Connecticut" have been shown to be a mixture of misquoted statutes and down-right lies. The so-called *Letters of Montcalm*, circulated in London in 1775, and quoted by Chatham in debate, were then challenged and, more than a century later, were proved to be the work of an Englishman, and set afloat by a vagabond named Roubaud; the *Memoirs* of General James Wilkinson are as reliable as those of that other warrior, Baron Munchausen. The *Travels* of Jonathan Carver, after passing unquestioned for more than a century, serving as raw material for Châteaubriand and Schiller, and unhesitatingly quoted by excellent and careful scholars were, by our late colleague, Edward G. Bourne, shown to be in large degree made up of scissorings from Charlevoix and La Hontan; and the very introduction was studded with gems of fraudulency.

Carver ought to have been detected—as he was suspected—a century ago; and would have been had historians been steeped in their material as are classical scholars and theologians. They should recognize fragments of Charlevoix with the same literary scent that would reveal a quotation from Plutarch in Gregory of Tours, or a sermon of Cranmer in the *Andover Review*. Nevertheless, barefaced copying is a bold but highly successful trick, as is shown in William Gordon's *History of the Revolution*, which for a hundred years passed muster as a first-hand account of things as they were, seen by an intelligent clergyman, right on the ground. Professor Libby, however, has had the temerity to com-

pare Gordon's history with the *Annual Register* written from year to year throughout the Revolution by unknown hands (probably Edmund Burke was engaged); and he finds that Gordon has simply lifted large extracts from that far-away source.

To adapt the work of others and foist it on the world as one's own is not the highest type of intellectual crime—after all it is only a kind of entry thieving: the overcoat though stolen may be whole and serviceable. There are higher fields of imaginary history in which Americans are also proficient. A proof of their skill was given July 1, 1905, when *Collier's Weekly* was deluded into publishing a facsimile of what purported to be a copy of "No. 294" of the *Cape Fear Mercury*, dated "Friday, June 3rd, 1775", in three columns, discovered by Dr. Miller, and containing the alleged Mecklenburg Resolutions of May 20, 1775. On examination by two candid experts, Salley and Ford, this facsimile and the so-called "original" raised many embarrassing questions: "June 3rd, 1775", did not fall on Friday; the number of a later issue than "294" was 266; other extant copies of the paper about that time were printed in two columns instead of three. In the opinion of Worthington Ford "it is a paper which is a really fine specimen of the forger's art."

As a bold and creative act of the imagination, however, nothing in American history surpasses Buell's recent *John Paul Jones*. Paul Jones is tolerably well known to investigators in the period of the Revolution as a wild merchant captain, a man cramped for money, a brawler, experienced in duels, fond of unselected company, but a patriot, a fine seaman, an intelligent officer, a splendid fighter, a leader of men, one who goes down to history along with Hawkins and Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh—his place among the immortals is secure. But the biographer must needs give his hero what he considers a proper background; Commodore Paul Jones ought to have a family and an estate; and Buell in the handsomest manner provides him with both in this paragraph:

Old William Jones had died in 1760, and by the terms of his will had made John Paul the residuary legatee of his brother in case the latter should die without issue; provided that John Paul would assume, as his brother had done, the patronymic of Jones. On his visit to Rappahannock in 1769, Captain John Paul legally qualified under the provisions of the will of William Jones by recording his assent to its requirements in due form. . . . The legend is that William Paul Jones was still breathing when his brother John Paul reached his bedside, but he never rallied enough to recognize him. In a few hours he died.

Supposedly the author copies his authorities and leaves nothing to the imagination. In fact every word of this statement is imagi-

nary, except the names of William Jones and John Paul Jones. Mr. Junius Davis from a study of the probate court records proves that William Jones did not bequeath anything either to William Paul or to John Paul; at his death he had no landed estate; William Paul never took the name of Jones; John Paul never was adopted by William and never registered his assent to adoption. William Paul did not die a few hours after the arrival of John Paul but the next year; he willed his property not to his brother but to his sister and her children; his will is signed William Paul and not William Paul Jones.

Similar explosive criticism might well be applied to other parts of the work. For instance, Jones is made to say in 1776: "Some 900 guineas remain in balance in my favor in the Bank of North America, or in the hands of Mr. Ross." This must have been a prophetic deposit, inasmuch as the Bank of North America was not organized until 1781. These astonishing documents are based on alleged originals which are not found in any other publication, and the manuscripts of which have never been produced; or on alleged printed sources, such as the *Memorial Papers of Joseph Hewes*, which are not to be found in any of the great libraries of the country, and the title of which is not in any authentic bibliography of North Carolina or of the United States. The statements of the book are contrary to probabilities, to the *Journals of Congress*, and to literary common-sense. Yet that work navigated successfully between the Scylla and Charybdis of the *Nation* and the *AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW*; and may be quoted by later generations as the only sympathetic life of a great figure in American history.

III.

To set in order both the historians and the sources upon which they reach their conclusions is the function of the most approved modern school of research and writing, and is one of the logical tasks of the American Historical Association, which is well known to be composed wholly of cautious persons who never open their mouths without a foot-note to a trustworthy original. What we need is a genuinely scientific school of history, which shall remorselessly examine the sources and separate the wheat from the chaff; which shall critically balance evidence; which shall dispassionately and moderately set forth results. For such a process we have the fortunate analogy of the physical sciences: did not Darwin spend twenty years in accumulating data, and in selecting typical phenomena, before he so much as ventured a generalization? History,

too, has its inductive method, its relentless concentration of the grain in its narrow spout, till by its own weight it seeks the only outlet. In history, too, scattered and apparently unrelated data fall together in harmonious wholes; the mind is led to the discovery of laws; and the explorer into scientific truth is at last able to formulate some of those unsuspected generalizations which explain the whole framework of the universe. That is the way in which Darwin came upon his universally guiding principle of natural selection; is it not the way in which historians must work?

The parallel with science carries us still further; in history as in biology, scientifically speaking every field is worthy of study; the fall of the Roman Empire, as much as the use of wampum as currency by the early colonists in America; and new fields constantly open. To be sure Thomas Arnold in 1841 was certain that historic "art stopped short in the cultivated court of the Empress Josephine."

To us, all is explored: imagination can hope for . . . no new continent peopled by youthful races, the destined restorers of our worn-out generations. Everywhere the search has been made, and the report received; we have the full amount of earth's resources before us, and they seem inadequate to supply life for a third period of human history.

What a fine subject for a doctor's thesis would be a criticism of Thomas Arnold on the Finality of Modern History! As in science so in history, every small monograph is a contribution to the materials at the service of the whole body of learned men: Darwin studied earthworms; and so we may study "borough English" (which it must be understood is not a dialect, but a rule of descent). In history every worker is an historian just as every true scientific man is an investigator.

As in pure science also the scientific pursuit of history includes a verification of the materials: every assertion must rest upon a source, as every scientific result rests upon experiment; and in history, as in other sciences, the final purpose is the synthesis of results, the combination of facts. Therefore Birrell says:

Facts are not the dross of history, but the true metal, and the historian is a worker in that metal. He has nothing to do with abstract truth, or with practical politics, or with forecasts of the future. . . . Maxims he will have, if he is wise, never a one; and as for a moral, if he tells his story well, it will need none; if he tells it ill, it will deserve none.

No one in the various schools of history denies that the scientific method is essential for the establishment of truth and for sound generalizations; and history benefits as much as any other branch

of learning from the scientific incredulity of investigators. Our facts are more fleeting; our deductions more subject to suspicion than in the pure sciences, but criticism is the breath of life of the study of mankind. Criticism is applied thought; and in no subject is there a clearer understanding that both the basis and the generalization of our knowledge must be subject to reason. It is one of the main objects of history to blast away the conventions and prepossessions which overlies our notions of the past.

IV.

Still the analogy of natural sciences may be pushed too far: we use terms like "research" and "investigation" as though history could be prepared in a laboratory with all the accidental causes shut away, with the phenomena which we wish to examine dissected out from the vast body of material; we speak of libraries as "laboratories of history"; but the ultimate material of history is neither books nor records but mind. We are dealing with the manifold manifestations of human nature; we are trying to decipher triple and quadruple palimpsests of human character; to understand and expound the actions of men who did not understand themselves; to find analogies between historical occurrences without being able to discover the causes of those slight divergences of race, of national characteristics, and of personal bent which upset all calculations. Furthermore, history is much more affected than any of the natural sciences by the appearance of abnormal individuals, of great leaders: the geographer is not, like the historian, obliged to change over all his theory of mountain-building because of the sudden appearance of peaks a hundred thousand feet high; nor does the botanist ever discover a king tree, a Napoleon of the forests, which overtops and dwarfs all the surrounding trees. Science does not need, like history, philosophers to ascertain the laws of the mind before generalizations can safely be made and laws deduced.

On the other hand, history has an advantage over most of the strict sciences in the abundance of materials: at first sight the investigator is overwhelmed by the tremendous mass of data. Carlyle says almost despairingly:

Social Life is the aggregate of all the individual men's Lives who constitute society; History is the essence of innumerable Biographies. But if one Biography, nay, our own Biography, study and recapitulate it as we may, remains in so many points unintelligible to us; how much more must these millions, the very facts of which, to say nothing of the purport of them, we know not, and cannot know!

The only way out of this obsession of facts has been pointed out by Professor Seeley, as summarized by a critic: "History is not a narrative of all sorts of facts—biographical, moral, political—but of such facts as a scientific diagnosis has ascertained to be historically interesting." The nightmare of the historical professor is the student who reverences facts and accepts any statement that he finds in print; to whom the revelations of a great man's barber and the great man's private correspondence with his sovereign are equally materials. The only way out of the tangle is to regard only cogent facts; but this raises the unavoidable difficulty that a finite mind must decide which facts are infinite; that what was cogent to George Bancroft may seem inconsequent to James Ford Rhodes; that the facts about the frame of mind of the Senate toward the President, so vital in the year of the impeachment of 1868, have grown cold and lifeless for our generation.

Some guidance may be found in using facts which fit together in causation: that is the principle of the natural sciences and it is still more valuable to the historian because his materials are the experience of mankind; he judges from historical cause to effect through the workings of his own mind. The great exponent of the theory of causation is, of course, Buckle, whose doctrine may be revealed in two sentences from his works:

Rejecting, then, the metaphysical dogma of free will, and the theological dogma of predestined events, we are driven to the conclusion that the actions of men, being determined solely by their antecedents, must have a character of uniformity, that is to say, must, under precisely the same circumstances, always issue in precisely the same results. . . . We have man modifying nature, and nature modifying man; while out of this reciprocal modification all events must necessarily spring. The problem immediately before us is to ascertain the method of discovering the laws of this double modification.

The application of these themes is easy—anyone may arrive at the causes in history; but the process is subject to the same difficulty as reading the Hittite inscriptions; various people decipher them, but the readings are all different. Critical historians are more or less cannibals: they live by destroying each others' conclusions; and their science gives some ground for the quip of the *Journal de Genève*:

Voltaire at least relates facts: modern historians write only to deny them. If they keep up this practice we shall come to the unhappy conclusion that nothing has really happened since the creation of the world. I do not find fault with criticism, on the contrary I prefer it to eloquence from those who relate the past, but after all I should like to have that past related.

Scientific history is in the position of the teacher who can instruct but cannot make her pupils love her. Says Dr. Crothers:

The Gentle Reader turns to these highly praised volumes and find himself adrift, without human companionship, on a bottomless sea of erudition,—writings, writings everywhere and not a page to read! . . . The historical expert starts with the Magna Charta and makes a preliminary survey. Then he begins his march down the centuries, intrenching every position lest he be caught unawares by the critics. His intellectual forces lack mobility, as they must wait for their baggage trains. . . . There are references to bulky volumes, where at the foot of every page the notes run along, like little angry dogs barking at the text.

Macaulay is guilty of saying that it is very easy "to write history respectably". There is perhaps no logical reason why scientific history should be dull, but even Bishop Stubbs, a path-breaker, if ever there were one, and a tower of sound historical learning, an inciter of truth and good judgment, was not enlivening; as witness this single sentence of his which is undeniably true, just, and helpful—yet which would not arouse a poet to an ode nor a nation to revolution.

I think that there are few lessons more necessary for men to learn, not merely who are going to take to public life, but who are going to live and move as men among their fellows, than these:—that there are few questions on which as much may not be said on one side as on the other: that there are none at all on which all the good are on one side, all the bad on the other, or all the wise on one and all the fools on the other; that the amount of dead weight in human affairs, call it stupidity or what you will, is pretty equally divided between the advocates of order and the advocates of change, giving to the one party much of its stability and to the other much of its momentum; that intolerance is no prerogative of heterodoxy, nor tolerance the inseparable accompaniment of the conscious possession of truth, a condition which might of all others the best afford to be tolerant, the most merciful and pitiful of error: that all generalizations, however sound in logic, are in morals and practical matters ipso facto false; that there is no room for sweeping denunciations, or trenchant criticisms in the dealings of a world whose falsehoods and veracities are separated by so very thin a barrier: to learn that simple assertion however reiterated can never make proof: that a multitude of half-believers can never make faith: that argument never convinces any man against his will: that silence is not acquiescence: that the course of this world is anything but even and uniform: that such by-words as reaction and progress are but the political slang which each side uses to express their aversions and their propensions; above all, that no material success, no energy of development, no eventual progress or consolidation, can atone for the mischief done by one act of falsehood, treachery or cruelty [*period*.]

Facts as facts, however carefully selected, scientific treatment in itself, however necessary for the ascertainment of truth, are no

more history than recruits arrayed in battalions are an army. We side with Emerson in his note of revolt against the reign of facts: "But if the man is true to his better instincts or sentiments, and refuses the dominion of facts, as one that comes of a higher race; remains fast by the soul and sees the principle, then the facts fall aptly and supple into their places; they know their master, and the meanest of them glorifies him."

V.

For years the Phi Beta Kappa Society kept secret the meaning of its three mystic letters; but long ago the world has been permitted to know that the members of that ancient and honorable body make Philosophy the Guide of Life. What is this philosophy, which seems so much stronger than material facts? I take it that it is that high quality of the mind which makes us see things as they are; and that it is only another term for imagination. To be sure that particular combination of five syllables was avoided by Professor Tyndall because "it is tainted by its associations, and therefore objectionable to some minds." "Imagination" is a suspected term only because it is so often taken to mean the first of the two kinds of imagination set forth in the two parallel derivatives "imaginary" and "imaginative". It was the former of these imaginations against which protested Hume's hard-polished Scotch mind when he said that "an idea of the imagination may acquire such a force and vivacity, as to pass for an idea of the memory, and counterfeits its effects on the belief and judgment."

Over against the materialism of Hume stands the idea which Blake the painter so graphically expressed: "Imagination is the real and eternal world of which this vegetable universe is but a faint shadow." And Shelley held that

Poets [by whom he meant men of imagination] are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance, and architecture, and statuary, and painting: they are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and true, that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion.

However noble the quality of imagination, it must be held under some restraint. "Gentlemen of the Jury", said Rufus Choate in opening a case, "By an unimpeachable witness I shall be able to establish clearly to your minds the precise moment when, no longer able to bear the accumulated burden of misfortune, the great heart

of my client swelled and broke." In due time the famous lawyer put upon the stand the unimpeachable witness, whose testimony was as follows: "I came in about half past six and I see the defendant here a settin' tipped up on the back legs of his chair with his head agin the wall; and I says to him, 'Abner', says I, 'What's the matter?' says I. 'Jim', says he, 'I'm afeared I have run agin a snag.'"

However you may define this mysterious quality of mind it has a place in historiography, for history is as much a philosophical subject as the economics upon which my colleague here is waiting to enlighten you. There are no facts of history that are not related to personality. The lava streams of Mount Erebus were as far removed from history as though they were on the surface of the moon instead of the Antarctic Continent, till human beings came within sight of them. When you begin your scientific inquiry into cause and effect in history, you must deal with human nature and human conduct. In order to appreciate conduct you must study standards. You cannot fairly find fault with Don John of Austria for capturing the enemy's private property at sea, or Lord Mansfield for sentencing sheep-stealers to be hanged. But neither conduct, which is outward action, nor standards, which are the condition of the outward act, necessarily reveal motives; and motives are the most interesting if the most elusive part of history. We know that Burr killed Hamilton; we know that Hamilton felt constrained to accept the challenge. How are we to know what is really most interesting and most important in that episode, just why Burr was so revengeful, so malign?

On this point also let us listen to Dr. Crothers's Gentle Reader—

Here is a conflict that has been going on for ages. The men who have done valiant service are not all smooth-spoken gentlemen in black coats—but what of it? They have done what they could. . . . The historian should not only know what they did, but what was the alternative offered them. There was the Prophet Samuel. Some persons will have no further respect for him after they learn that he hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord. They think he ought to have stood up for Free Religion. They take for granted that the alternative offered him was religious toleration as we understand it. It was nothing of the sort. The question for a man of that age was, Shall Samuel hew Agag in pieces, or shall Agag hew Samuel in pieces, and my sympathies are with Samuel.

The basis of history is human nature, the expression of human nature is through history, whether scientific or literary or judicial or imaginative; and therefore history must include the study of

persons. Plato makes a rhetorician tell Socrates that when he went to Sparta the people "required me to lecture them on genealogies, and when I began to discourse to them on this subject they would hardly allow me to make an end". This interest in one's forbears is one of the sanest applications of the human mind, especially inasmuch as we know our ancestors pretty well and our posterity not at all. But though you can study the succession of human character only by looking backward, you have the advantage of seeing many historical dramas clear to the last act. We know the past better in some ways than did the men and women of the past, who could not see the results of their own action. At every turn imagination comes in: everywhere we get beyond what Dr. Donne called "those unconcerting things—matters of fact". Facts are useful as giving a key to character. That James I. never washed his hands is a sociological fact not so shocking to that age as to this; that James I. wrangled with the Puritans at Hampton Court is a fact which illuminates his whole make-up, explains his quarrel with Parliament, accounts for the Mayflower Company.

A little imagination helps one to sympathize with the great men of the past; to understand the limitations of their surroundings. Against the habit of pulling down national heroes there is a visible reaction. Horace Walpole in his *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard III.* was one of the first to go into the interesting pursuit of revising the judgment of mankind on a supposed scoundrel. That has been the favorite task of Froude, who may be said to have chiselled for himself, out of a block of very seamy marble, a new statue of Henry VIII. The book of a well-known military critic upon Napoleon brought from one of his legal friends in Boston the comment "I never knew before that John Ropes was a good criminal lawyer." Edmund Andros has his apologists; Aaron Burr his defenders; somebody has adduced evidence that Benedict Arnold was a misunderstood patriot.

Whether saints militant or sinners errant, great men confuse all the categories of the scientific historian. Tolstoy may look upon them as merely the foam on the top of a vast billow, but, in a world of human nature in which the sternest critics have not been able entirely to banish free will, a great man is a dynamic influence; Louis XIV. delays the adjustment of Europe for two centuries; and Napoleon catches up the two hundred years and completes the national development in a decade. Perhaps nobody is indispensable in history, but it is easy to see in the career of Zwingli and Calvin that without Luther the German Reformation would have failed.

If George Washington had been shot at Braddock's Field, the English colonies in North America might have remained English for another half-century. Without Abraham Lincoln the rivalry of North and South would have gone on indefinitely. Great men perhaps do not make history; they are never greater than the country through which they work, but they concentrate history, reflect it, exemplify it, alter it. Great men have some power to accomplish things; they are the spokesmen of national purpose; they at least suppose themselves to be re-making the world, and no strictly scientific statement can account for great men or measure their influence.

Scientific history professes to know neither right nor wrong. In old-fashioned hospitals there was a thing called "laudable pus", and we are all familiar with the "vicious circle", but to the genuinely scientific mind there is neither vice nor virtue; the massacre of St. Bartholomew is like the Great Awakening of 1740-1742, simply a material for study. Every investigator knows that imaginative history cannot, in the nature of things, be dispassionate; and many historical writers feel a responsibility for pointing out the moral lessons of the evils that they describe. Without developing the whole study of man on every page the historian must nevertheless consider to what end his people, his nations, his combinations of human wills are tending. Every historical student likes to look on his own work as a road-book which not only describes the bridges and the turns and hills but tells you where you can put up for the night and how far it is to Rome. How far history is in itself a moral influence is debatable; but on this side the scientific method fails; there is much in history that cannot be measured like atomic weights, or averaged like insurance losses.

To imagination, or rather to fact infused by imagination, is due this meeting to-day. For the American Historical Association is based on the expectations of those who, in faith combined with abundant works, founded the society in 1884. 'Tis but twenty-five years ago; and yet of the forty original members who took part in the organization over half have joined the majority; and less than ten are present to-day. This movement which has done so much to unify, enlarge, and strengthen the forces of historical research and publication, sprang from the insight, the hope, and the practical imagination of a small number of teachers and writers of history, especially Herbert B. Adams, the founder; Charles Kendall Adams; Charles Deane; Moses Coit Tyler; and Justin Winsor. They claimed for their subject of study all the rights and privileges of a great field of learning; they stimulated younger men by their

precious friendship; they banded the scholars of the country together; they set, in their own works, a high example of patient, thorough scholarship; and they possessed that understanding of human character which is the beginning of historical writing. Out of that group of scholars three of the survivors deserve from us all a special gratitude which they have never claimed: J. Franklin Jameson, two years ago titular president of this Association, and always *princeps* in his interest, his wisdom, and his single-heartedness; Clarence W. Bowen, whose prophetic vision has seen a learned society steadily enlarging its powers through the judicious use of its funds, who is willing to abandon his beloved surplus for any new activity, and nevertheless finds that surplus magically added to our investments at the end of every fiscal year; and Andrew D. White, the first president of the American Historical Association, and to this day—wherever he goes—an association in his own person of a teacher of history, a university administrator, a public man, and a warm friend to rising scholars.

VI.

At every turn, whether you consider the field of the historian, the scope of history, the historical method or the purpose of history, one finds this impotence of facts taken by themselves, this infusion of a shadowy something which may be called sentiment, or the ideal, or spirit, or imagination. Hence numerous efforts to teach history outside of facts. Earlier mankind loved to drape a few facts with robes of imagination, in myths which doubtless preserve some history, like flies in the amber, and are historical materials only so far as they reveal the things that people liked to believe. The modern world is not without its myths; to be descended from gods is a distinction which the Emperor of Japan to this day insists upon as his. Andrew Lang has wickedly applied the scientific tendency to develop a myth in the story of our own times, to prove that:

Gladstone is really and primarily the thunderbolt, and secondarily the spirit of the tempest. They quote an isolated line from an early lay about the 'Pilot who weathered the storm', which they apply to Gladstone in his human or political aspect, when the storm-spirit has been anthropomorphized, and was regarded as an ancestral politician. But such scanty folk-lore as we possess assures us that the storm, on the other hand, weathered Gladstone. . . . Among the epithets of Gladstone which occur in the hymns, we find 'versatile', 'accomplished', 'philanthropic', 'patriotic', 'statesmanlike', 'subtle', 'eloquent', 'illustrious', 'persuasive', 'brilliant', 'clear', 'unambiguous', 'resolute'. All of those are obviously intelligible only when applied to the sun. . . . The enemies of Gladstone, the *Rishis*, or hymn-writers who execrated

him, were regarded by his worshippers as a darkened class, foes of enlightenment. Gladstone is said to have 'no conscience', 'no sense of honor', to be so fugitive and evasive in character that one might almost think the moon, rather than the sun, was the topic under discussion. But, as Roth points out, this is easily explained when we remember the vicissitudes of English weather, and the infrequent appearances of the sun in that climate.

American history, on its controversial side, has been enriched by several distinct attempts to manufacture myths to order. The first of these might be called the worship of the Pilgrim Fathers: it is the ascription to a band of men and women, who represented a splendid cause and were pioneers in a magnificent historical pageant, of virtues which are in fact possessed only by their descendants. My ancestor, Stephen Hart, helped to settle Cambridge, and later was one of the fundamental orderers of the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut; but in the Pequot War he massacred Indian women and children mercilessly. I take no responsibility for his acts; I refer the case to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

A similar myth causes the exaltation of the Southern Cavalier, who was a personage about as infrequent in Virginia as in New York; it is at least remarkable that few of the great Virginia families of the nineteenth century can show a Cavalier lineage: neither the Jeffersons, nor Madisons, Monroes, Marshalls, Carters, Carys nor Bryans trace undoubted descent from one of the bearers of the love-locks.

In many ways the most interesting of the American myths is that which has clustered about Marcus Whitman and which was resolved into its elementary gases by our late colleague, Edward G. Bourne, a scholar eminent in both constructive and destructive critical spirit. Quite different in kind is the George Washington myth, "popular delusion chiefly due to Mason L. Weems, who with unwinking inaccuracy sets himself forth as 'formerly Rector of Mount Vernon Parish'". Weems has never been properly understood by the American public; he landed himself among the immortals by writing what is substantially a romance—a kind of patriotic *Sanford and Merton*—not intended to give information about George Washington but to suggest virtuous conduct to young Americans. Who but an expert performer upon the imagination could personify Washington's father on the boy's refusal to divide a fine large apple with his brothers and sisters: "George looked in silence on the wide wilderness of fruit. He marked the busy humming bees, and heard the gay notes of birds; then lifting his eyes filled with shining moisture to his father, he softly said, 'Well, Pa, only

forgive me this time; and see if I ever be so stingy any more.'” Human nature rebels at this attempt to make a prig out of a youth who was probably more likely to steal apples than to divide them.

A generation ago people otherwise blameless read Louisa Mühlbach’s so-called historical novels—*Frederic the Great and his Family*, *Joseph the Second and his Court*, etc., and thought they were absorbing European history. On the other hand, some of the most wonderful works of the human mind have been novels which have put historical fact through the crucible of the imagination of genius: the *Scarlet Letter*, *Quentin Durward*, *Henry Esmond*, are not only works of art, but contributions to history, whose writers have put themselves in the place of the people they describe and have represented for us a bygone time.

VII.

Andrew Lang, whose irreverence I have already several times rebuked, in his essay on *History as she ought to be Wrote*, roundly asserts:

Historians jump, like Mr. Froude, into a sea of MSS. and bring up a book of absorbing interest. . . . Or they pore over their work with a patent double-million magnifying pair of spectacles, and never produce anything worth looking at. Of the two maladies, give me Froude’s disease. Measles is better than paralysis.

Quite the contrary is the view of Bishop Stubbs:

I would almost rather that boys were attracted by the reading of *Ivanhoe* and the *Talisman*, books which do not pretend to be true, and are full of strange misrepresentations of manners and thought, than by a serious History composed with a view to the picturesque only or mainly. . . . Our real education in History must not be less precise or severe than the discipline of language or of natural science.

There is perhaps a middle way between measles and paralysis: it is not really necessary to drive unhappy boys to the misery of reading *Ivanhoe*; something may be done by making real history attractive. A century ago one William Butler, teacher in a girls’ school, conceived the idea of harnessing Clio to the go-cart of female education and he wrote a book entitled *Arithmetical Questions*, of which the purpose was to infuse the mind with lofty examples while it was wrestling with mathematical problems. Here is an example:

No. 201. FEMALE PATRIOTISM. The generous exertions of the American daughters of liberty in Philadelphia, and the neighbourhood, to assist the continental soldiers, in the war with England, are mentioned with deserved approbation by Dr. Gordon. Desirous of sharing with the gentlemen of America in the splendors of patriotism, and as-

piring to the honour of giving the army some public mark of the esteem they entertained of their virtue, they formed a female association, and collected subscriptions for this purpose. Their donations, says the historian, purchased a sufficient quantity of cloth, and their hands made the same into two thousand one hundred and seven shirts, which were delivered to the person appointed to receive them by General WASHINGTON. . . . Supposing each shirt contained 3 yards and $\frac{1}{4}$, how many pieces, each consisting of 25 yards and $\frac{1}{2}$, must the American ladies have purchased, to have accomplished their patriotic purpose? *Ans.* 268 pieces, 13 yards $\frac{3}{4}$.

Picturesque history, as distinguished from dull history on the one side and dramatic history on the other, may be interpreted by the word itself: it is the attempt of the historical writer to write so that his readers may see what he describes. A remarkable example is Froude's account of the execution of Mary Queen of Scots.

The tables and forms had been removed, and a great wood fire was blazing in the chimney. At the upper end of the hall, above the fireplace, but near it, stood the scaffold, twelve feet square and two feet and a half high. It was covered with black cloth; a low rail ran round it covered with black cloth also, and the Sheriff's guard of halberdiers were ranged on the floor below on the four sides to keep off the crowd. On the scaffold was the block, black like the rest; a square black cushion was placed behind it, and behind the cushion a black chair; on the right were two other chairs for the Earls. The axe leant against the rail, and two masked figures stood like mutes on either side at the back. The Queen of Scots as she swept in seemed as if coming to take a part in some solemn pageant. Not a muscle of her face could be seen to quiver; she ascended the scaffold with absolute composure, looked round her smiling, and sate down. . . . One of her ladies handed her a pair of crimson sleeves, with which she hastily covered her arms; and thus she stood on the black scaffold with the black figures all around her, blood-red from head to foot.

This is certainly a wonderful word picture. You can see the stairway and the hall and the scaffold—and the blood-red queen. Perhaps there is too much of the

"I've measured it from side to side
Just three feet long and two feet wide."

And the extract reveals one of the dangers and the mischiefs of picturesque writing. Where is there historical proof that she was clad in "blood-red"? The source says "red", of which there are many shades. Froude, like many picturesque writers, had no objection to adding a few details to make the picture more striking—details which so far as historical truth is concerned are nothing but the diamonds on the stomacher of the wife of the Vicar of Wakefield.

Even the most scrupulous picturesque historian leaves in the

mind the impression of constant excitement. Indians were not always scalping nor Cossacks burning villages. Creighton is right when he says: "History cannot be made picturesque by the skill of the writer. . . . It is useless to attempt to make it so by deliberate omissions of all that is not picturesque. We must take human affairs as they come." The heroic, the startling, the extraordinary are fairly the prize of the historian, who must always seek to sound the depths and measure the heights of national life; but history includes also the ordinary commonplace experiences of mankind; hence economic and social history have made a place for themselves alongside the narratives of political events.

As for the pictile arts of style, it is a great thing truly to represent past times; to make us see the people as they were; to sit with our cold feet in the dirty rushes which covered the floor of the Tudor nobleman's hall; to march with the Parisian mob from Versailles escorting the captive royal family; but that is only an adornment for history. It is like learning our Louis XIII. from the Rubens pictures in the Louvre. Clothes, armor, table pewter, and pet animals are part of the setting of history, in so far as they help us to realize our ancestors, but they are only the furniture of history after all. The historian who aims chiefly at picturesqueness shuts himself up with the lesser part of the facts which really inform. He makes a continuous performance out of a national life that is full of commonplaces; only once in a generation is a nation stirred to its noblest thoughts.

Most picturesque history is simply what Hume decried—an effort to combine confused memories into an image of the truth. Mere picturesqueness is not imagination at all, but a realism which is the less satisfactory because no historian can photograph the multiplicity of details, he must always sketch and give broad effects. The simply picturesque writer is simply an impressionist.

VIII.

Of the different types of historical writing which have been described—the fraudulent, the scientific, and the picturesque—none seems to reach to the high towers of the mind. It was all very well for Ranke to begin his lectures: "I will simply tell you how it was." Did not his students really get "how it was" as seen through the mind of Ranke? The dictum that history must be objective, that it consists in a proper marshalling of facts, leaves out of account the varieties of humanity in historical characters and in historical writers. What a man does is conditioned by the make-up of his

mind; by what he thinks about what he does; and in addition the reader's judgment is affected by the mental peculiarities of the historian who describes that mental process.

Here is the opportunity for the great historian. Real, vital history is not simply a condensation of facts, it is a transmutation of the lifeless lead of the annals into the shining gold of the historian. Far above the picturesque in history, which is only the art of assembling striking details, is the dramatic in history, which is breathing the breath of life into the men of bygone times. It is an art which stands alongside that of the painter, the sculptor, and the architect; which puts the great historian parallel with the philosopher, the seer, and the poet. This essential in the writing of history, this power to assemble the dry bones and to make them live, is nothing more nor less than imagination.

Nor is imagination the exclusive property of the artist or author. It is the quality which most of the captains of industry nowadays possess in marked degree. The successful business man is he who can, in his own mind, reproduce the thoughts of his fellowmen so as to foresee their demands. Any commercial traveller will tell you that a man must understand human nature in order to sell a bill of goods. The chief quality of a great statesman is the power to understand the aspirations of a nation and to provide for desires that are as yet felt hazily. For example, the Duke of Wellington and George Washington were very much alike in mental make-up: both passed for matter-of-fact, unemotional men but in reality they both had an astonishing insight. They knew what soldiers would do; they guessed what the enemy would do or leave undone; they understood what their countrymen longed for, expected, and would sustain.

For imagination as applied to narration, in the selection of facts presumably true, in their arrangement and statement with simplicity and charm, take an instance from an American writer once read by school-boys—now too little regarded—John Lothrop Motley, whose chief fault was the consciousness that he was writing a sort of prompt-book of history, where the characters were to appear at their cue and to impress the world with their greatness. Take for example his account of the memorable battle of Lepanto:

A courier, despatched post haste to Spain, bore the glorious news, together with the sacred standard of the Prophet, the holy of holies, inscribed with the name of Allah twenty-eight thousand nine hundred times, always kept in Mecca during peace, and never since the conquest of Constantinople lost in battle before. The King was at vespers in the Escorial. Entering the sacred precincts, breathless, travel-

stained, excited, the messenger found Philip impassable as marble to the wondrous news. Not a muscle of the royal visage was moved, not a syllable escaped the royal lips, save a brief order to the clergy to continue the interrupted vespers. When the service had been methodically concluded, the King made known the intelligence and requested a *Te Deum*.

In this paraphrase of an original Spanish narrative, you see how the author brings out his king into the foot-lights; how the other characters step back so as not to disturb the unity of the moment. It is dramatic, it is effective, it is also historical.

The same qualities of dramatic vigor, of power to seize men and things and group together those that belong together, to describe men in their habits, to separate them from other men, belong also to Tacitus, who has been conspicuously a model of conciseness in style, but abounds also in a sense of progress, of movement of a dramatic combination of history. How genuinely dramatic his comment on his own narrative of Nero's crimes:

If I were telling of foreign wars, and of men dying for their country in ways thus like each other, I should even so be surfeited, and expect my readers to feel weariness and disgust at this long sad tale of citizens coming, however nobly, to their end; but the story of all this servile endurance, all this blood wasted wantonly at home, wears out the mind and wrings the soul with melancholy. Nor can I ask my readers to accept any other plea than this—that I cannot blame the men who perished thus ingloriously. For these things came of the wrath of the Gods against Rome—a wrath that may not be passed over.

No discussion of imagination in history could be complete without that most striking example of the imaginative historian—Macaulay. There are fashions in history as in other matters. Hume was read at one time, and felt that his work must be a great one for the "Best Seller's" reason, because "Notwithstanding this variety of winds and seasons, to which my writings had been exposed, they had still been making such advances, that the copy-money given me by the book-sellers, much exceeded anything formerly known in England: I was become not only independent, but opulent." Macaulay has been in and out of fashion several times: the scientific historians find him unreal; the dull writers think him meretricious, but one thing is certain—you may get history from Gardiner or Stubbs or George Bancroft, but in reading Macaulay you get Macaulay. He puts into every page his own experience of life; he moves forward and backward; everywhere he finds comparisons, allusions, parallels, categories. Take for instance his judgment of Cromwell:

The Cavaliers could scarcely refrain from wishing that one who had done so much to raise the fame of the nation had been a legitimate

King; and the Republicans were forced to own that the tyrant suffered none but himself to wrong his country, and that, if he had robbed her of liberty, he had at least given her glory in exchange. After half a century during which England had been of scarcely more weight in European politics than Venice or Saxony, she at once became the most formidable power in the world. . . . The Huguenots of Languedoc, the shepherds who, in the hamlets of the Alps, professed a Protestantism older than that of Augsburg, were secured from oppression by the mere terror of his great name.

The arousing style, the prodigality of knowledge, the real interest in, acquaintance with, and love for, historical characters (though he may have misjudged them as we misjudge our acquaintances) combine to put Macaulay in the front rank of the world's historians. He is great because of his dramatic power; his people are all taking a part in a mighty movement; one after another speaks his lines, telling us himself why he is on the stage, or by indirection making us aware of his assignment.

IX.

Above that dramatic instinct which links Macaulay with Shakespeare and Hawthorne, there is an even higher quality which the greatest historians have hardly reached, the power of insight, the capacity not only to discern the character of men, and the capacity of mankind, but to see whither a people is tending. Far be it from the historian to prophesy. That fountain of wisdom, James Bryce, has shown how two men as oracular as Alexander Hamilton and Alexander de Tocqueville saw dangers impending to the American commonwealth which never took effect, and entirely overlooked the most serious threats to national existence and greatness. When Edward A. Freeman in 1863 wrote a *History of Federal Government down to the Disruption of the United States*, he reminded the world that it is the historian's business to deal with the past rather than with the future. One eminent man of our time, Lamprecht, has set himself distinctly to interpret the whole process of history, and even he, the strongest modern advocate of a study of the many rather than the few, of searching for a basis of history in race-experiences rather than in individuals, even he exuberantly declares that with

youthful feelings of anticipation, with an ecstatic presentiment of dimly felt combinations, are the portals of a new epoch entered. Science becomes a prophecy, philosophy turns to poetical metaphysics. . . . The advance step in all this was a clearer view of the vast combinations of the phenomena of the *mass-psyche*—an advance which brought one to describe vital points poetically, in part or wholly so.

To understand great men, to reveal them to later generations, requires a spirit of divination and foresight and of dwelling upon large things. Almost all critics acknowledge that the first of American historians is Francis Parkman, and the insight of that quiet, unassuming man, whose connection with public men and the management of states was very limited, is due chiefly to his power to see the drama in human life. Here is what (in his autobiographical fragment) he says of his own work:

Before the end of my Sophomore year my various schemes had crystallized into a plan of writing the story of what was then known as the "Old French War"—that is, the war that ended in the conquest of Canada—for here, as it seemed to me, the forest drama was more stirring and the forest stage more thronged with appropriate actors than in any other passage of our history. . . . My theme fascinated me, and I was haunted with wilderness images day and night.

A single extract from Parkman will show how far he was able to achieve his great plan:

Saussaye anchored in a harbor on the east side of Mount Desert. The jet-black shade betwixt crags and sea, the pines along the cliff, pencilled against the fiery sunset, the dreamy slumber of distant mountains bathed in shadowy purple, such is the scene that in this our day greets the wandering artist. . . . Perhaps they then greeted the adventurous Frenchman. Peace on the wilderness; peace on the sea. Was there peace in this missionary bark, pioneer of Christianity and civilization? Far from it. A rabble of angry sailors clamored on her deck, ready to mutiny over the terms of their engagement. . . . The company, however, went ashore, raised a cross, heard mass, and named the place St. Savior.

Here are the elements of true imaginative history: the setting sketched with a few bold strokes, the personality, the event, the relation to the conquest of a new world. Few writers have ever established such sympathy and understanding between themselves and the personality of men whom they never saw.

I have said that it needs a seer to comprehend a statesman; in the same way it needs a poet to comprehend a seer. It is hard to find anywhere a clearer statement of the perplexities and the broad reach of history than Wordsworth's *Convention of Cintra*:

The history of all ages; tumults after tumults; wars, foreign or civil, with short or no breathing spaces, from generation to generation; wars—why and wherefore? yet with courage, with perseverance, with self-sacrifice, with enthusiasm. . . . The visible and familiar occurrences of daily life in every town and village; the patient curiosity and contagious acclamations of the multitude in the streets of the city and within the walls of the theatre; a procession, or a rural dance; a hunting, or a horse-race; a flood, or a fire; rejoicing and ringing of bells for an unexpected gift of good fortune, or the coming of a foolish heir to his estate.

Test this idea of the assemblage of historical events and characters to make an inspiring whole by an example from the writer who combines more of the qualities of a great historian than any other one man. Here Gibbon stands looking on at the triumph of an emperor:

Since the foundation of Rome, no general had more nobly deserved a triumph than Aurelian, nor was a triumph ever celebrated with superior pride and magnificence. The pomp was opened by twenty elephants, four royal tigers, and above two hundred of the most curious animals from every climate of the North, the East, and the South. They were followed by sixteen hundred gladiators, devoted to the cruel amusement of the amphitheatre. The wealth of Asia, the arms and ensigns of so many conquered nations, and the magnificent plate and wardrobe of the Syrian queen, were disposed in exact symmetry or artful disorder. . . . But every eye, disregarding the crowd of captives, was fixed on the emperor Tetricus, and the queen of the East. The former, as well as his son, whom he had created Augustus, was dressed in Gallic trowsers, a saffron tunic, and a robe of purple. The beauteous figure of Zenobia was confined by fetters of gold; a slave supported the gold chain which encircled her neck, and she almost fainted under the intolerable weight of jewels. She preceded on foot the magnificent chariot, in which she once hoped to enter the gates of Rome. . . . The most illustrious of the senate, the people and the army, closed the solemn procession. Unfeigned joy, wonder, and gratitude, swelled the acclamations of the multitude.

Gibbon was a grand man, the prince of historical writers, who, whatever he is writing, is always describing a triumph; for his sentences rank themselves right-forward and fours-right; his paragraphs succeed each other in platoons and squadrons; his chapters are army corps moving forward to the sound of trumpets and cymbals, banners flying, armor gleaming, commanders on caracoling horses, all moving forward steadily, resistlessly, and magnificently.

Let us now hear the conclusion of the whole matter. The danger of the historian is in imagination, that is, in the kind of imagination which invents details or seizes upon the unimportant ones, or combines them into pictures which are but the outside; which tell us nothing of the stir and movement of human souls, the clash of human wills, of the thinking of national thoughts. There is another kind of imagination which works from within outward; which makes the reader see, as the historian sees, the real characters of men; which divines their motives; which, allowing for human weaknesses and for the pressure of adverse circumstances, informs us whether this or that man, this or that people, this or that age, this or that standard has carried forward civilization, opened wide the gates for thought, liberated souls. There is no great history without large

imagination, any more than there is painting, or, for that matter, scientific discovery. Of all the writers of time not one has more clearly seen this task of the historian than the American sage Emerson :

You shall make me feel what periods you have lived. A man shall be the Temple of Fame. . . . I shall find in him the Foreworld ; in his childhood the Age of Gold ; the Apples of Knowledge, the Argonautic Expedition, the calling of Abraham, the building of the Temple, the Advent of Christ, Dark Ages, the Revival of Letters, the Reformation, the discovery of new lands, the opening of new sciences and new regions in man. He shall be the priest of Pan, and bring with him into humble cottages the blessing of the morning stars, and all the recorded benefits of heaven and earth.

ALBERT BUSHNELL HART.